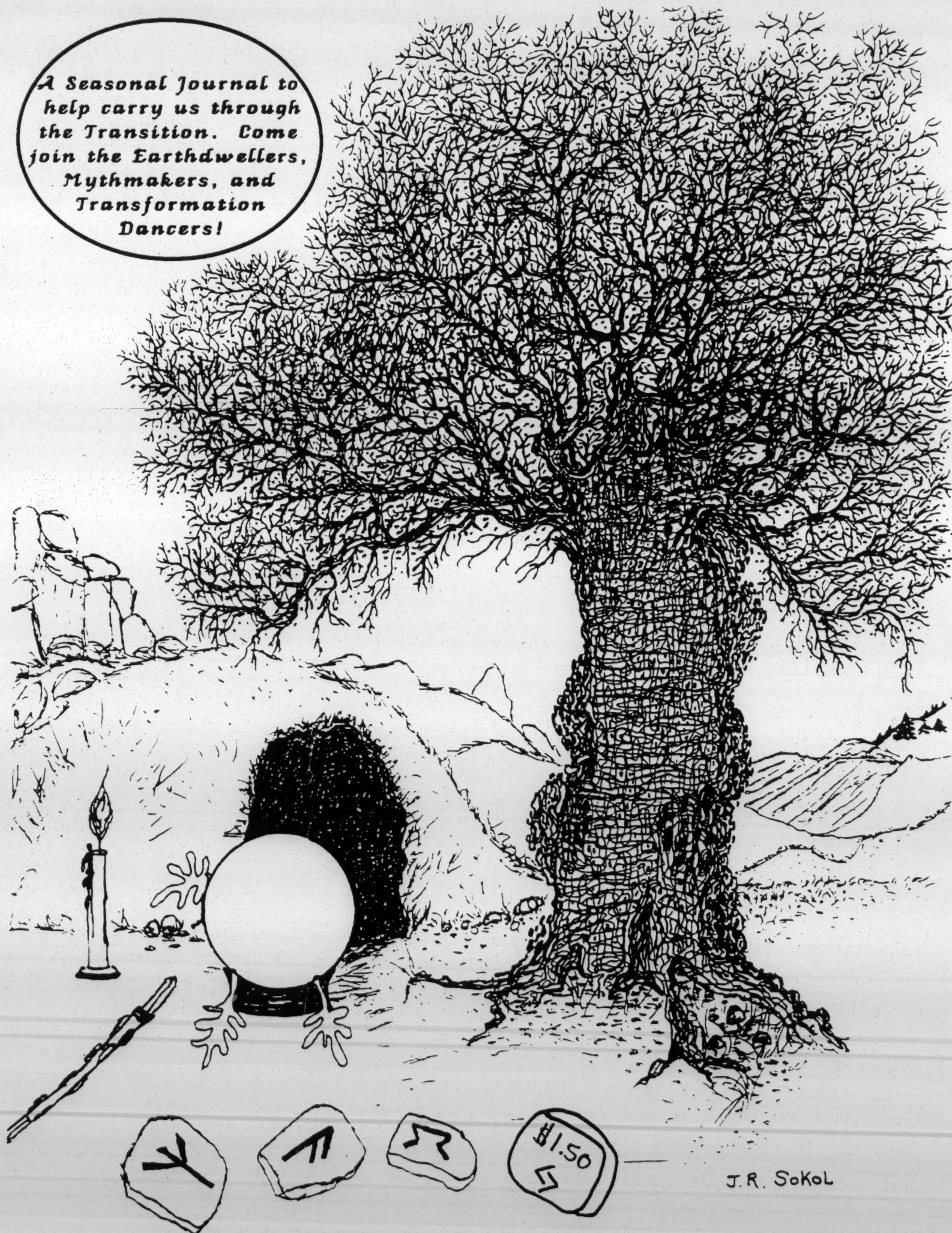


# The Serpent's Tail



*A Seasonal Journal to  
help carry us through  
the Transition. Come  
join the Earthdwellers,  
Mythmakers, and  
Transformation  
Dancers!*



J.R. SoKol

*Fall Equinox/Samhain Issue 1990*





**The Serpent is an ancient symbol that has been revered by many cultures from China to India to native North America. It represents the image of the life force in the field of space and time, continually throwing off death and being reborn. As the snake sheds its skin to be born again, so too does life shed its generations one after the other and create new ones. The serpent is in the form of a circle eating its own tail, as does life live by killing and eating of itself, dying and rebirthing, like the moon casts its shadow to become full again. The serpent thus is a representation of the primal mystery and paradox of life.**

**The ancients recognized that the Earth had various energy lines and the nodules where they came together much like our nervous system. These were perceived as winged serpent or dragon tracks which carried power from one place to the other. These so-called "ley lines" were traced across the continent from the dolmens of the ancient Celts in Brittany and Ireland (where mysterious "circles" are suddenly appearing today) to the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio to the Dragon vein processions in Asia.**

**We once again need to recognize the connections between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between our bodies and the Earthbody so we can try to keep in harmony with the Earth as Gaia, as a serpent force; a living organism with her delicate balance between life and death.**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

"Seasons" is a collective that publishes The Serpent's Tail, a quarterly journal that has been conceived to disseminate information on planetary consciousness, the reverence of Natural Laws and advocates a wholistic and balanced approach to all things. We believe that human beings are not meant to take "Dominion of the Earth" as written in the Bible, but are a part of the Great Web of Life in which all creatures are interdependent. Of imminent importance is the preservation of our planet, of Earthmother, for it is Her body that sustains us. We are endangering our planet and therefore ourselves through overpopulation, the burning of fossil fuels and other consequences of the Industrial Revolution. The forces that have driven the modern industrial world will have to reckon with the "life out of balance" (Koyaanisqatsi) they have created. Prometheus's act of stealing fire caused him to be condemned by the Gods for upsetting the natural order. Let us not be condemned for the same reason.

The Natural Laws are the governing principle behind everything and apply to all. The world of form, of creation, is the process that unfolds according to the underlying Natural Laws. Potency comes from knowing which direction the flow is going and acting accordingly. Therefore, it is wise to observe and consider these laws and work with them rather than against them.

One of these Natural Laws is the Law of Polarity. This Law states that all things contain their complementary opposite. As in a pendulum that swings too much in one direction and therefore must swing back again, any over-determined action in one direction will produce its exact opposite or polarity. By studying the Law of Polarity, we realize paradoxically that freedom comes from obedience to the Natural Order, power comes through cooperation, the wise leader leads without coercion, independence comes through service and greatness is achieved through selflessness.

In order for a change in outside manifestation to take place, there first must be a change of consciousness within. The greatest is reflected in the smallest and vice versa. We are on the path in search for new explanations to the age-old Great Mysteries. Science is changing our Creation Myths and the Old Man has been blown from the sky. We therefore are asking our readers to help rewrite the old myths that no longer reflect the "Zeitgeist" that we live in and create the mythology that will determine the New Aeon as we enter the turning of the Millenium.

**AS ABOVE, SO BELOW**



## Parting The Veil

*A Ritual in loving celebration and memory of the dead who have left us the legacies of their existence, and a salute to the rising god force in his season.*

This point of the year is heavy in the Crone time. The Wheel of the Year is marked heaviest with the weight of all that has transpired through the past seasons, beginning with the last Winter Solstice. Heavy and slow, the balance of energy shifts to empower and usher in the male aspect of the year.

On the path of the wise, we celebrate a new year at this Samhain (pronounced sōwin or saveen) time of the final harvest. In nature, the dying off of vegetation also signals her hibernation after the dropping of seed in promise of new life, born at the Winter Solstice and growing up with the first green shoots of Spring.

This is a time of reflection. We have reaped the harvest and now use the power of this time to gain insight for transformation into a new year, a new cycle.

In the archetypal myths of old, Persephone descended to the underworld at this time. Her mother Demeter, in mourning at her daughter's loss, caused the fields to lie fallow and the earth to be dormant. When Persephone was released (by Hades) and called back in the Spring, life was renewed on the Earth. This symbolization usually depicts Persephone with a cornucopia, and is therefore an appropriate decoration for your ritual space, along with fruits and vegetables of the season, dried corn stalks, nuts and harvested herbs, and a pomegranate.

For this ritual, a wreath of oak leaves is fashioned before-hand to crown the Horned One in his rise to power. A billhook (sickle) or scythe decorated with greenery should also be a part of his presentation. If

neither of these is available, a decorated knife or sword may be used. These should be placed in the east prior to the casting of the circle.

An unlit black candle and a holder should be placed on the altar. An ancestor's altar should be set in the northwest, with votive candles (enough for each participant), pictures of departed loved ones, perhaps flowers, and a libation bowl set on it.

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Near the main altar, any aides for the meditational work such as musical instruments, tape player all set to be switched on and recordings, or divinatory tools such as tarot cards, a scrying bowl of water, etc. should be placed for accessibility.

To begin, a priestess anoints each person on the third eye as they enter the ritual space. A welcoming and blessing may be spoken or silent. A priest smudges or censes each person in turn with sage, a traditional smudgestick (sage and sweetgrass) or a special blend mixed and blessed for this purpose. The priest and priestess also anoint and cense each other.

The circle is cast with the ritual knife in a sunwise direction -- deosil (jeshl), beginning and ending in the North.

The priestess next cleanses and charges the water. The priest consecrates the salt and mixes some into the water with the knife. The Circle is purified with the salt (earth) and water. Following this, the censer is taken around to purify with fire and air.

Next, the wards are set. Beginning in the East, the watchtowers/guardians of that direction are invoked. An invoking pentagram of earth is drawn (Apex, bottom left, far right, far left, bottom right, and apex again) and the watchtowers are summoned to guard the circle. The candle is then lit in the eastern quarter. Moving around the circle to the South, then West, then North, and last to center, the invoking pentagram of earth or the appropriate element is drawn, the elemental watchtowers are summoned, and the directional candles lit.

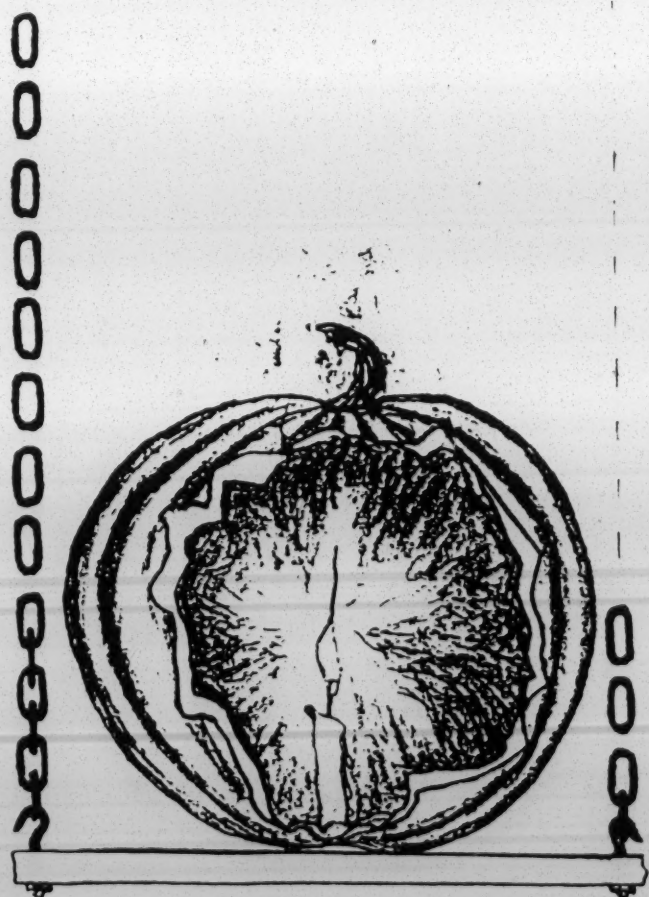
Next the goddess and god are invoked and their respective candles lit on the main altar. Examples of appropriate invocations of the goddess could be to call upon Hecate as the underworld goddess of transformation; of Cerridwen as the

Dark Mother grain goddess whose cauldron is the source of wisdom and inspiration; or of Arianrhod as goddess of reincarnation.

Invocation of the god may be to Herne, who tends both sides of the doorway between the worlds of light and shadow, who sees the hunter and the hunted.

The priestess then welcomes all comers to the circle together, and reminds them of the solemnity and significance of this place in the year, of the time when the veil between the worlds of the material and the ethereal, of thought and of form, is at its thinnest. Through heightened sensitivity and awareness, we have the ability to reach beyond our physical realm to receive messages from those who have gone beyond and exist on the astral plane.

As this point of the year calls for personal transformation and looking toward the future, it is a worthy time to leave something behind, to cast off some negative aspect of one's identity or attitude or some negative thought form counter to a state of balance. The black candle is used for this purpose.





A priestess removes the unlit black candle from the altar. If there is a small group, the candle may be passed around and inscribed with a word or symbol that represents to each that negative quality or aspect they will imbue into the candle. Afterward, or otherwise if the group is larger, every person takes a hold of a portion of the candle and all chant and send their giveaway into the candle, building the energy of intent and focusing it into the candle. The grip on the candle need not be firm (and don't be surprised if there are breaks in it anyway).

Once the candle has been charged, it is placed in a secure holder, lit and set beneath the central cauldron or inside it if the cauldron is stationary. In the absence of a central cauldron, an appropriate placement would be between the west quarter candle and toward the ancestors' altar in the northwest.

At this point, attention is focused to the ancestors' altar and the candles placed there. Each participant should light a candle from any of the existing altar or quarter candles, mindful of those departed loved ones they wish to honor and/or call upon. After a brief personal meditation on this, all participants gather around the center, sitting in a circle. a priestess takes the pomegranate from the main altar and rejoins the group. Holding it out towards center and offering it as the fruit of death, and rebirth, it is then cut open. Three seeds are fed to the priest, who in turn feeds three to the priestess, each asking the other to partake of the fruit of death and rebirth. Persephone's fruit is then fed and passed to each person round the circle, offering and feeding each in turn.

At this point in the rite, a deeper meditational working may take place. The form of the journey should be decided on beforehand by all members of the group. A guided meditation or one involving taped

music or voice may be preferred; or a form of scrying as with a bowl and water, candle, or tarot cards, or a candle placed in the cauldron beneath smoked glass -- whatever form the group decides.

With all ways the intent is the same: to focus inward to open the mind as a channel to receive guidance/messages from the spiritual realms. The divinatory/meditational form is a vehicle for tapping into the ancestral/astral world we wish to contact.

After sufficient time has passed and everyone returns to themselves, the ritual food and drink is blessed and passed to all in the group. Libation should be set aside to be given back to the earth, and a libation should also be left on the ancestors' altar. It is helpful to talk about individual experiences resulting from the journey and/or to record them in a personal journal. Generally, it is also an opportune time in the year to record dream messages. Especially if messages were received from someone who has recently crossed over, the receiver may want to share that insight and receive mutual support from the group; especially so if the period of grieving and adjustment is still active.

After cakes and wine, as the death of the year has been celebrated and the seeds of rebirth eaten/planted, it is time to crown the Horned One as he assumes his rightful place in the year.

Ideally, an older woman to represent the crone aspect of the goddess and of the year is chosen, although as all women represent the crone at times, age need not be the sole determinant in selecting the priestess most suited to the role.

Starting in the east, the crone priestess picks up the sickle or other blade and begins around to the south. Her head is high, as is the blade, and she proceeds in youthful stride, speaking clearly and spritely:



*"I was the rise of your  
springtime fire."*

Proceeding south to west, the blade lowers slightly, her step more evenly paced, her voice in the fullness of a mother:

*"I was the light of your  
shortest night."*

At this point, the priest who is to be crowned as the Horned One quietly slips to the east, just beyond where that quarter candle is burning.

Proceeding west to north, the blade is now below her waist, her step slower and more purposeful, as is her voice:

*"I was the heart of your  
harvest fires."*

And next, north back to east, the crone is full in her aspect, the blade is weighty, she walks very slowly, tiredly, perhaps stooped under the weight of the year. She speaks:

*"I am the soul who returns to  
the void."*

As she reaches the Horned One, she withers to the earth; he bends to support her in her "death." She lifts the oak crown to his head.

He kisses her and lays her gently to her rest, picks up the blade and rises.

As he ascends, the chant slowly begins:

*Hoof and Horn, Hoof and Horn  
all that dies shall be reborn  
Corn and Grain, Corn and Grain  
all that falls shall rise again.*

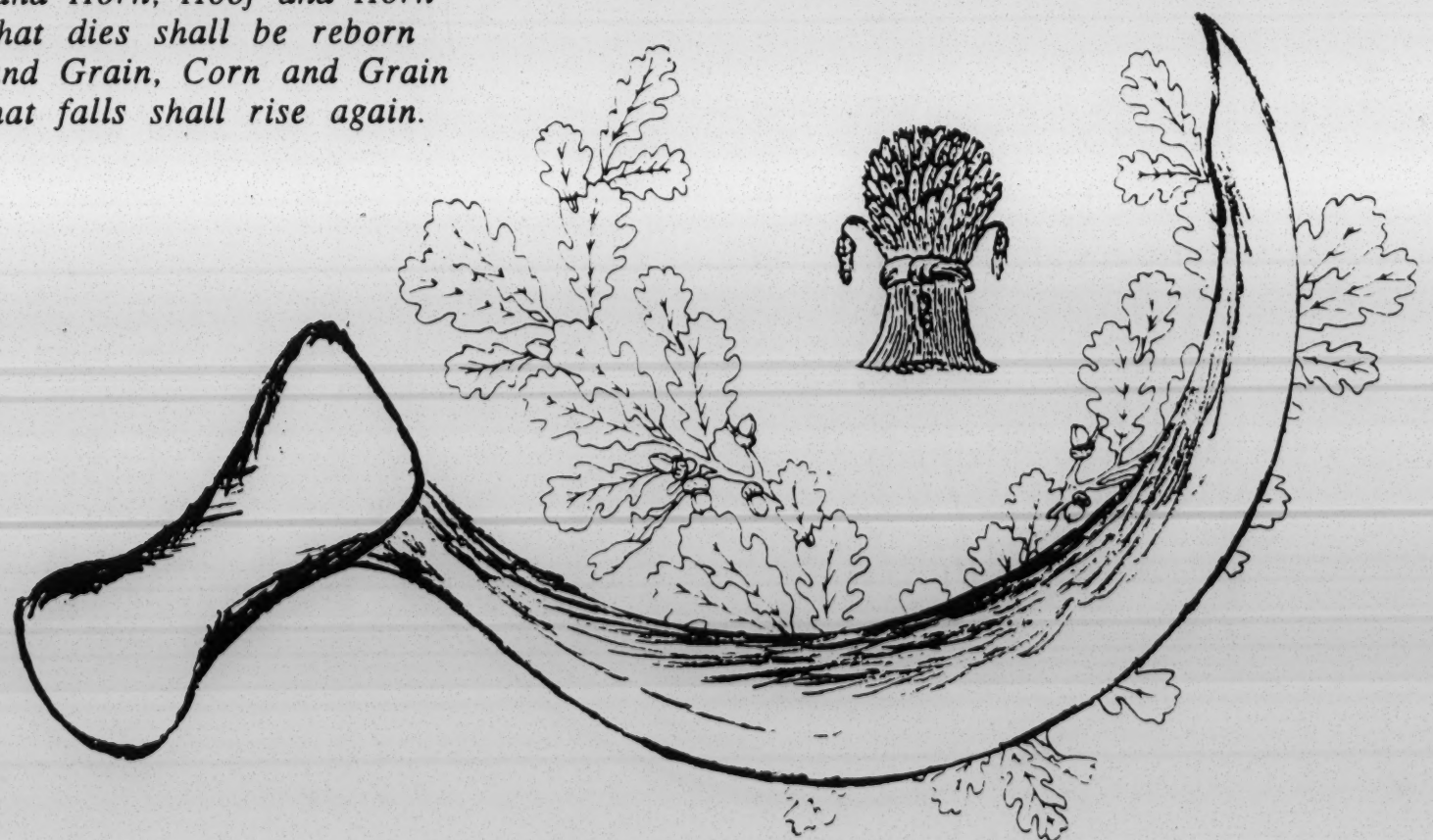
Each person then approaches the Horned One and either silently or aloud voices a request as a need or desire for the new year. After each has visited the Horned One, all join back to center where the chant intensifies to its crescendo, and at its peak the power is sent for seeding the group's collective wishes. Everyone earths their energy (into the cauldron).

The circle is then taken down, beginning in the east. The watchtowers are thanked and sent, with earth banishing pentagrams (bottom left, apex, bottom right, left, right, bottom left) drawn at each quarter. Any stray or unbidden energies or entities are also sent in the banishing.

The circle is thus opened and the magickal work is done!

*This ritual is written for a  
"leaderless" group. Purposefully  
references were made to a priest(ess),  
rather than the High Priest(ess), as  
different group members may assume  
these roles throughout.*

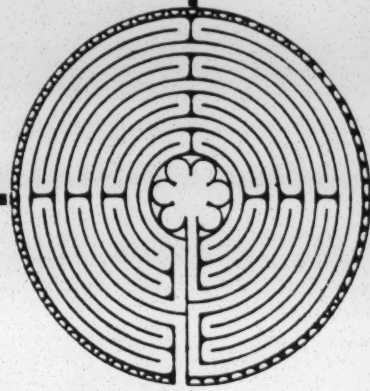
*However, in its design, this  
ritual is suited for most types of  
group structures or can be adapted  
for the solitary practitioner.*





# Voyage to the Bottom of the Soul

## Part 1. Crossing the River



*"O nobly born, the time hath now come for thee to seek the Path. Thy breathing is about to cease. Thy guru hath set thee face to face before the Clear Light; and now thou art about to experience it in its Reality in the Bardo state, wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked spotless intellect is like unto a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre. At this moment, know thou thyself; and abide in that state. I, too at this time, am setting thee face to face."*

The preceding paragraph, taken from The Tibetan Book of the Dead, is repeated several times into the ear of a dying person by their guru in order to help guide them calmly through the experiences they are about to encounter on their journey to the Otherworld. According to the Buddhist lamas, after a person dies, they enter the "Bardo" state which lasts 49 days and is comprised of a series of ever-deepening and degenerating states of consciousness. The Bardo progression is similar to Eastern initiation rites where, as in all such ceremonies, the initiate undergoes a transformation of consciousness. In this particular rite, the climax comes at the beginning, at the moment of death, and is followed by a descent into illusion and clinging to ego and thought-forms which ultimately lead to a new physical birth. Therefore, bear in mind that the book is often better understood if read backwards. The purpose of this text was to familiarize people with the art of dying which, to them, was as

important as learning about the art of living.

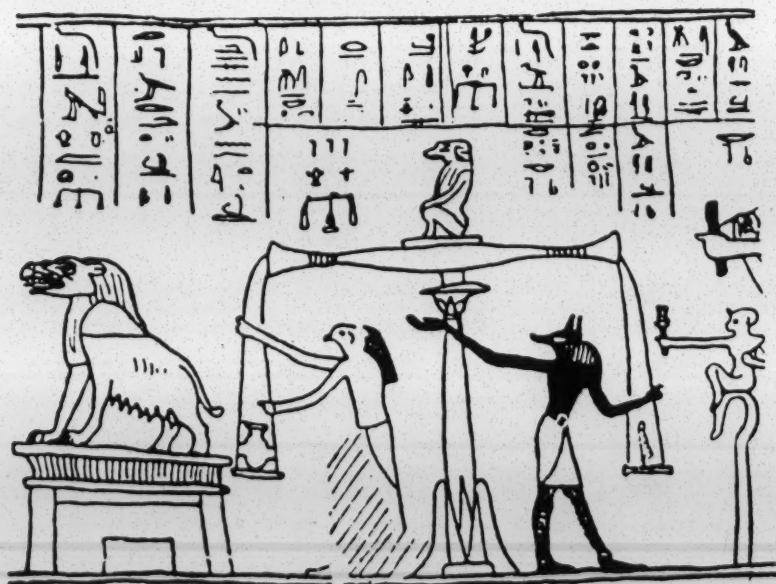
Upon closer examination, the journey described may not only be applied to the death experience, but also entails the experience of entering shamanistic states ("wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked spotless intellect is like unto a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre") and the confronting of one's own shadows and demons ("know thou thyself"). These are the elements that comprise the "journey within" that can manifest itself in many forms, from death to schizophrenia to psychoactive experiences. I would like to examine all these topics more closely as we enter the dark half of the year and would like to begin this series for the Samhain issue with the topic of death.

The Tibetan Buddhist philosophy of death presupposes the idea of reincarnation which has been rejected by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Surprisingly though, this idea has reoccurred throughout history, sometimes without conscious knowledge of it. Socrates intuited before he drank the hemlock that the living do come from the dead, just like the new sprouts in Spring grow out of the decay of the previous harvest. In The Book of the Craft of Dying, it is said, "Against his will he dieth that hath not learned to die. Learn to die and thou shalt learn to live, for there shall none learn to live that hath not learned to die."



In the West, the prevailing doctrine of the afterlife is based upon the moralistic judgmental notion of good versus evil. Morally correct souls would go to a better "place up there" that is separate from the earthly realm and dwell forever in blissful eternity. Those who did not live their lives according to the Law of the Book were condemned to eternal punishment to somewhere "down there" where hellfire and Satan awaited them.

These beliefs were often grounded in pre-Christian historical contexts, such as the Persian belief in Light vs. Darkness who battle rather than complement each other as they do in the Eastern yin-yang symbol. The idea of a "Judgment Day" where the righteous gathered on the right hand of God and the sinners on the left (sinister = Latin word for left) probably came from the Egyptian mythology. In their Underworld, the deceased person's heart was placed on the scales against the Feather of Truth and judged by the jackal-headed Anubis. If equally balanced, the dead person would be able to continue on and become one with Osiris, the Lord of the Dead. If not, he would be devoured by the monster Am-mit.



*Am-mit at the Judgment of the Dead  
Egyptian papyrus*

The Eastern concept of reincarnation, however, does not imply any eternal rewards or punishments, but carries with it the idea of karma or action. What karma means is that whatever thoughts or deeds we commit will produce further related results, so therefore everything will come back to us in one form or another sooner or later. This is also known as the Threefold Law in Wicca and is also a law of physics: "Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction."

The oriental belief in reincarnation and karma tells us that whatever karma one accumulates in a previous life is transferred over to the next life where it is either resolved and one evolves to the next level, or it is ignored and is again repeated until the lesson is learned.

A common misconception in the West of reincarnation, often the result of ego-centered, rationalized thinking, is that the individual ego is reborn into a new person, when just the opposite is true. It is not the ego that is reborn, but the reincarnating *monad*, which is comprised of the *All* or the *source* and takes on flesh by incarnating into individual egos in order to further its development. When Yoko Ono tried to explain the death of John Lennon to her young son Sean, she said that "Daddy has gone back to join the All."

Due to the idea of karma, Buddhists and Hindus found it very important that a person should be psychically trained for death because it was believed that the last thought at the moment of death determined the character of the next incarnation. The purpose of The Tibetan Book of the Dead was to help the dying person to face death heroically with their minds rightly directed, so that they could progress positively to their new incarnation. The idea was to acquiesce to the knowledge that the body was susceptible to old age and disease and



that it was useless to cling to one's individual ego. Rather, the corruptible flesh was to be relinquished and the individual soul returned to the source from whence it came, as the river to the sea, to take on a new young body.

It is unfortunate that in the Judeo-Christian tradition that the death aspect of the god/desshead is condemned, denied and assigned to the realms of the Devil. If one saw that the deity was comprised of both good and evil, creative and destructive forces as the ancient Greek god Abraxas was perceived to be, then we would not be asking silly questions like "If God is so good, then why do we have wars?" We also might not go around touting idealistic fantasies such as ending all wars forever without acknowledging their place in the scheme of things.

This denial of the shadow is painfully apparent in our funeral practices. The corpse is embalmed, furthering the desire to cling to the body, and make-up is applied to the deceased to make them look like they were still alive and sometimes even younger. Our fear of aging is reflected in fashion magazines, the "L.A. Look," our youth culture and rich plastic surgeons. The stark face of death is never graphically shown in magazines. Funeral homes never have large picture windows and always look elegantly somber.

In America, every effort is made by the for-profit medical establishment to interfere with the death process. The dying patient is not permitted to die at home but is often hooked up to intravenous tubes at the hospital to force them to cling to life as long as possible. The dying is given some mind-numbing opiate so that they will never experience death fully, much in the same way they try to interfere with the birth process.

The most heinous of these practices is the sustaining of patients who have long been brain-dead and

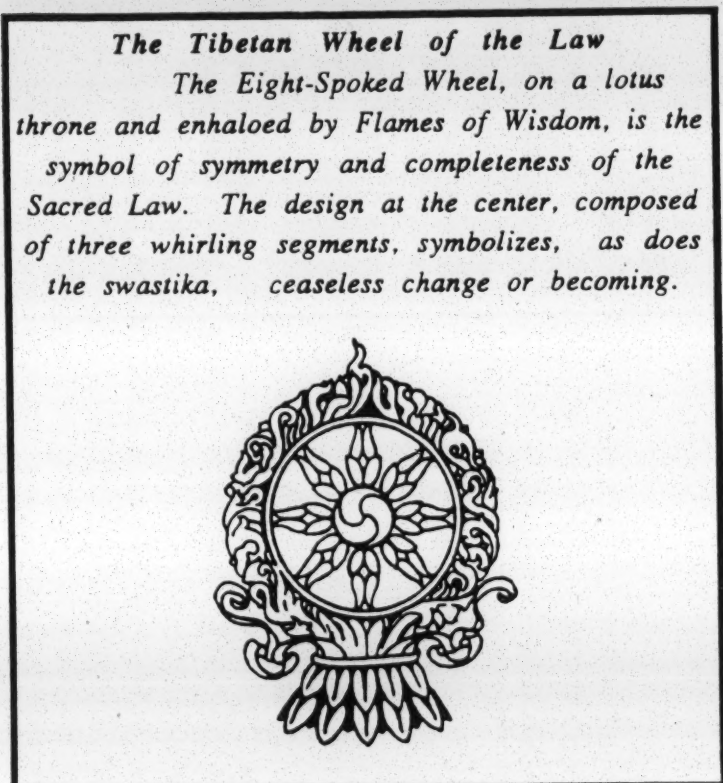
will never recover from the vegetative state they are in. While the medical establishment and attorneys make their profits debating the right to die, the poor families of these victims are branded as murderers if they want to ease their suffering and allow their loved ones to pass from the limbo state they are in over to the other world. As a result of these policies, desperate people have turned to the doctor with the suicide machine and an Euthanasia Society has been formed in England that will provide people with the means to die if they so desire.

The journey described in The Tibetan Book of the Dead begins at the moment of death with the climactic experience coming at the beginning rather than the end. Here, the ultimate experience occurs just as life ends, implying that life is the vehicle for the highest perfection one can obtain. It describes the encountering of a vast, brilliant, radiant light. This light is the manifestation of the soul, of consciousness, of the god/desshead. It is the perpetual light of the Voidness, the "transparent vacuum", the resting place on the hub of the wheel of rebirth, freed from all illusions of birth and decay.

I once had a dream which I later realized had the same mythic connotation as the description of light given above. In it, I saw a sculpture of the body of a man and the fins of a mermaid in sexual embrace. Below the sculpture, was the inscription, "In the eye of the storm, we are in the midst of death." After reading many books on mythology, I realized that the "eye of the storm" is the same silent "hub of the wheel" that is fixed and calm, but is the principle behind all life and from whence comes the "storm" or all physical moving forms. It is the same as the stillpoint of death, of the nameless Tao from which spring the processes of Nature or the Ten



Thousand Things. The man embracing the fish I believe was symbolic of the animal drive for sex, of the constant desire for life and rebirth out of the void of non-being.



It is this same long dark tunnel with a bright light at the end that is often referred to from people who have had a near death experience. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' book, On Death and Dying, chronicles hundreds of similar accounts taken from people who have come close to death. Many of them describe encounters with the radiant light in which they were so drawn into it because it gave them such a feeling of bliss that they did not want to come back. One man said that he had asked the Light all the questions about everything he had ever wanted to know and he knew them immediately. Some people claim these visions are due to the body's reaction to shock and are merely illusions. I ask, why make the distinction? Which is real and which is not?

A former Royal Navy Commodore who had a schizophrenic breakdown (schizo=split + phreno=mind) describes a vision in which all of those surrounding him

in the madhouse were in kind of a "purgatory" (purging, cleansing) where they were waiting to be awakened. They were waiting to climb this large pyramid on top of which was God (or Buddha-consciousness or the Awakened One). He was the ultimate madman because he was bearing all of the enormous burden of having to be aware of everything and having to govern and run things. (The Arabs believe that madmen have seen the face of Allah). "The journey is there and every single one of us", he reported, "has got to go through it, and you can't dodge it, and the purpose of everything and the whole of existence is to equip you to take another step, and another step, and so on..." This is very interesting coming from someone who had no previous knowledge of oriental philosophies and religions.

The next Bardo state described is called the *chonyid* and is the state of karmic illusion which results from the psychic leftovers of previous existences. Karmic illusion comes from a belief in a visionary world of an extremely irrational nature that is the product of uninhibited imagination or fantasies. This state of mind occurs when the rational mind is closed down and the normal checks imposed by the conscious mind are lifted. It is here that the disintegration of the bardo body takes place and is equated with the dismemberment of the psyche which also occurs in schizophrenic states. This is the point at which the self is sacrificed, torn apart and the deceased is forced to let go of their attachment to the ego.

The *chonyid* state, if read backwards for better understanding, begins with the tearing apart of the self and ends with at-one-ment with the Great Light or Void. The journey starts in terror and darkness and is accompanied by visions of the archetypes in their most horrifying



form. What the traveler must learn is that these thought-forms are just projections of their own subjective thinking. The world and its experiences are symbolic and reflect something that is hidden in the person themselves. The *chonyid* state derives its name from this profound intuition; it is also called "The Bardo of the Experiencing of Reality." The thought-forms experienced in the *chonyid* state take on reality and fantasies become real.

The demons encountered at this stage are described as the god Death, followed by power-holding and blood-drinking sinister goddesses. These are reminiscent of the Hindu goddess Kali who is revered as the ego/animal-nature slayer in India. She wears a necklace of skulls, carries a flaying knife with a thunderbolt handle and drinks blood from the top of a skull. Kali is a symbol of the destructive forces in nature such as anger, wars, disease, famine and pestilence. She is accepted and celebrated by her followers who willingly participate in this wild dance of death.

After encounters with a myriad of demons, we find that a certain order begins to take place. The gods and goddesses are arranged according to the four directions and the four mystical colors. It gradually becomes clearer that all the deities are organized into mandalas, or circles, containing a cross of the four colors. On a higher level of insight, the dead person already knows that these real thought-forms all emanate from themselves and there is nothing to fear. At the end of this descent, we come to the effluent blue light of the Buddha-body, which glows in the midst of the mandala from the heart.

With this final beautiful vision, the karmic illusions cease and consciousness is weaned from all forms of attachment to the ego and to objects and returns to the timeless, formless state which is experienced at the moment of death.



*Sarva-Buddha Dakini, the Buddhist counterpart of the Hindu Goddess, Kali*

The final stage of the "night-sea" journey, if read backwards, is called the *sidpa* Bardo or the "Bardo of Rebirth". Here, the deceased becomes more and more attached to the instinctual, reptilian, root chakra sphere and in the process sees couples in union as the desire to "go into the flesh" (incarnate) becomes ever stronger.

The traveler feels they are being pulled backwards in time through several stages of evolution, from animal to fishlike to one-celled creatures. The man who had the schizophrenic breakdown mentioned previously also had a sense of splitting off and regressing. He felt he was being swept backward, falling into his own past, becoming an infant and then a fetus in the womb. He had the frightening experience that he was slipping back into animal consciousness, into sub-animal forms, and even plants.



Thus, as the human embryo mirrors the whole course of evolution in its stages of development, so do we contain memories of all biological history in our subconscious. Here are stored the records of our past lives, the history of humankind, all pre-human forms of life and the very consciousness that makes life possible in this universe.

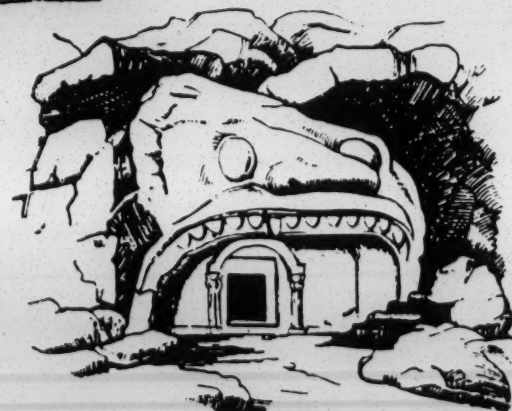
One may ask why don't most people remember their previous births, lives and deaths? First of all, due to the lack of remembering a previous death leads most people to believe there wasn't one. But, they also cannot remember their previous birth and know full well that they were born. They forget that their conscious, waking mind is also complemented by the dreaming, subconscious. The reason why we cannot always immediately call up ancestral memories is because the subconscious is guarded. If its heavy doors were to be pulled back, the mind would be overwhelmed and crushed and some may be pushed to the brink of insanity.

Therefore, the guardians at the gate in most mythologies ask the traveller a question to see if they are ready to enter or point out what they need to know before coming in. The gates of the subconscious are guarded by all initiates and shamans who have entered there and are veiled behind the secrets of mysteries and symbols.

As the journey continues, there is a feeling of being pulled through a long tunnel towards the "womb door". This image is also reminiscent of the tunnels seen in the near-death experiences and have also been interpreted to be memories of the birth experience. The *sidpa* state allows no return as the voyageur is pulled by an intense striving downwards, back into the world of karma, the world of form and illusion, back into physical rebirth.

Thus we see that "crossing the river" into the "Summerland" is simply a journey of transformation, of metamorphosis (to change body) and need not be feared. The traveller undergoes a journey not only back through time and evolution, but also into the depths of their own mysterious subconscious. The Buddhists believe that the ultimate goal is to free oneself from the chains of rebirth. Westerners, I believe, are more caught up in the material world and would probably welcome rebirth.

The West is also very "pro-life" and tends to vehemently prevent the allowance for death. The favoring of life over death denies existence itself because existence consists of both life and death. Life and death are inseparable opposites and complementary polarities and one should not be favored over the other. The ignorance of how the laws of nature operate leads to the preference of life and the denial of death which inevitably will cause tension.



Above: "Maw of the Earth", Aztec

Below: Entrance to the "Tiger Cave", India

The protecting, fecundated womb of the Earth is also the deadly devouring dark hole of the depths. The Earth who generates life also takes it back to herself.



Therefore, in this Samhain season of wither and decay, we joyfully dance this transformation and gracefully accept our own bodies aging, as we lay down the old so that it may rest and become as new again. We see that we can learn from death as don Juan tells Carlos Castaneda in Journey to Ixtlan, namely, that "death is our eternal companion", looking over our left shoulder, reminding us of our own mortality and at the same time making us feel even more alive. Those who have come close to death have felt more grateful for being alive upon their return. The paradox of life and death is that you have to die in order to be reborn....

*We lay our garments  
down to fall  
on our beds where  
soon we'll rest.  
For death will soon  
disrobe us all  
of what we now possess.*

*(Sung to "Amazing Grace")  
Karin Clark*

Next issue: "Shamanism & the Ritual  
Use of Hallucinogens"

## ***The Unwanted Dead***

I think about an alternate reality in which readers of the Serpent's Tail, the mythical Milwaukee pagan community get together to have a Samhain ritual. By all accounts it seems that nothing spiritually uplifting happens. The dead of the netherworld have heard our petitions and ignored them -- at least that is what we think.

The dead did make their presence known, but they were not the ones that we expected. We invited a lot of dead attitudes and rivalries. Those are the Dead that we spend the most time maintaining, the Dead that divide the pagan community in Milwaukee.

A recognition of these failings is not a condemnation of any individuals or groups. Any large group of pagans will have some inherent problems. Many people with major emotional hurts come to paganism, because they have been unable to find answers elsewhere. Our "clergy" is often self-declared, and is often lacking in the interpersonal skills that other clergy get as a part of their formal training. If we ever hope to achieve unity in the Milwaukee pagan community, we must first address these problems.

We can improve our chances of working together as a community by becoming more astute as interpersonal communicators. Just because we practice communication every day does not necessarily mean that we are proficient communicators. Fortunately, communication is a skill that can be learned like any other skill.

There is a great deal of bitterness and anger among pagans in Milwaukee. Bitterness and anger are not justifiable emotions, they are personal weaknesses. We can learn how to change our attitudes and emotions, and we should; the benefits of doing this are too great to pass up.



*The Return, Roman marble relief*



Accepting and delivering of criticism is such a large part of communication that it can be treated as a subject on its own. This is the area of communication where we can feel, and inflict the most pain. We can reduce this pain by learning techniques for giving and receiving criticism.

The books that I list below give helpful techniques that anyone can practice to get along better with others. At least two of the three can be found in that great cooperative resource known as the library.

I do not see the reality of empty Samhain ritual. In fact, it seems prudent to avoid ritual at any time that the group is not communicating. We would do ourselves a great service by gathering socially to practice the magic of interpersonal communication.

#### ***Suggested Readings:***

##### ***Attitude adjustment***

Feeling Good by David  
D. Burns

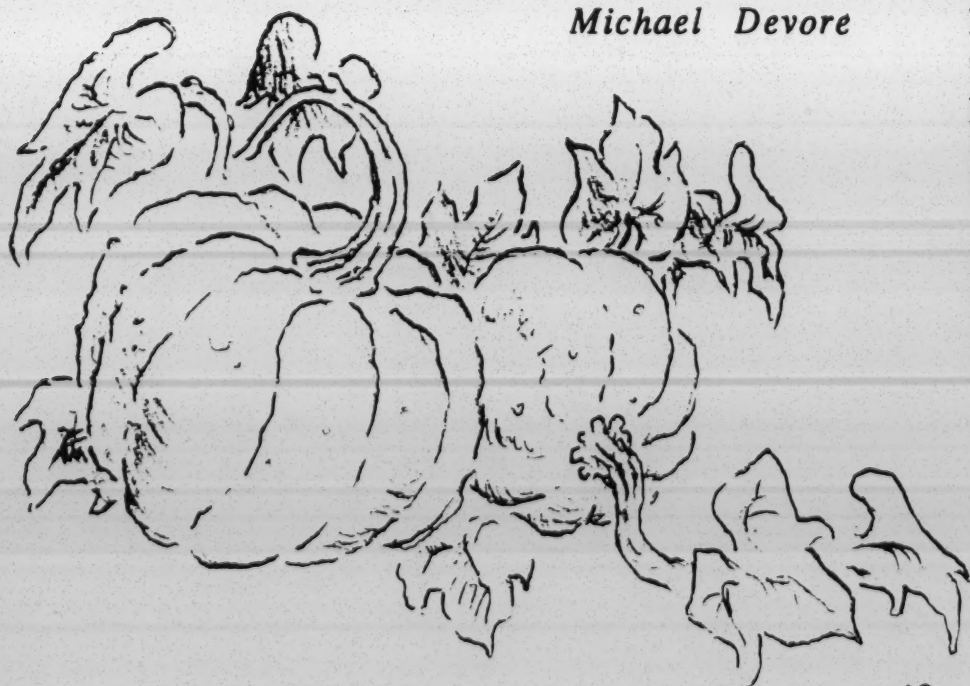
##### ***Interpersonal Communication***

Conversationally  
Speaking by Alan  
Garner

##### ***Criticism***

When Words Hurt by  
Mary Lynne Heldman

*Michael Devore*



### ***The Pumpkin, Not Just Another Pretty Face***

Now that the sultry, sunny days of summer are behind us and there's a smokey nip in the air, our culinary thoughts turn to concord grapes, apple cider, cranberry bread, caramel apples, and of course, pumpkins!

"Pumpkin" is derived from the Greek word "pepon", which means a large melon. No one is sure whether the pumpkin came to the New World from Asia or the other way around. But one thing is sure: pumpkins have been around for hundreds and hundreds of years. Seeds have been found in ancient Oriental ruins.

Over the years many ethnic groups have valued the pumpkin for its delicate yellow flesh, an excellent source of vitamins A and K, and for its pleasing shape.

This autumn, when you are searching for your perfect jack-o'-lantern, remember to try some of these delicious, healthy recipes, using the "staple of our American forefathers", the pumpkin.

#### ***Herbed Pumpkin Soup***

2 onions                      2 minced garlic cloves  
1 T. olive oil              2 T. lovage  
2 T. cilantro                1 T. flour  
2 pints vegetable stock and salt  
1/2 pint half & half  
3 T. chopped parsley  
1/4 pumpkin

Slice onions and saute' with the garlic in the olive oil. Add lovage, cilantro, and then the flour. Cook for a few minutes. Add the pumpkin, diced, the stock and salt. Stir until it comes to a boil, then simmer until the pumpkin is cooked. Add the half & half, whizz for an instant in a blender. Gently reheat and add chopped parsley before serving.



### **Indian Pumpkin Bread**

2/3 C. butter  
4 C. brown sugar  
1 C. crushed, cooked pumpkin  
4 eggs  
3 1/2 cups flour  
1 C. apple cider  
1/2 t. nutmeg  
1 C. chopped pecans  
1/2 C. chopped cranberries  
1/2 C. raisins  
1 1/2 t. cinnamon  
1/2 t. baking powder  
2 T. baking soda  
1 C. applesauce

Cream butter and sugar and add eggs, beating well. Stir in applesauce and pumpkin. Sift dry ingredients together; add nuts, berries and raisins. Stir in apple cider and mix well. Pour into 2 greased and floured bread loaf pans and bake for 1 hour at 350 degrees.

### **Cherokee Roasted Pumpkin**

1 small pumpkin  
3 T. apple cider  
3 T. dark honey  
3 T. melted butter

Wash pumpkin well, place on a pie pan, and bake in a 350 degree oven for 1 1/2 hours. Remove from oven and cut a hole in the top of the pumpkin about 4" in diameter. Scoop out pulp and seeds. Mix together cider, honey, and butter. Baste the mixture over the inside flesh of the pumpkin. Replace the top. Return to the oven and bake for 40 minutes longer, basting often. Serve whole, scooping out individual portions at the table. Ladle cider mixture over each serving.

### **Pumpkin Flapjacks**

2 C. buckwheat flour  
1 t. baking soda  
1/2 t. salt  
1 t. cinnamon  
1/4 t. ginger  
1/4 t. nutmeg  
2 t. baking powder  
2 beaten eggs  
1/4 C. corn oil  
1/4 C. cooled coffee  
1 1/2 C. buttermilk  
1 C. pumpkin  
maple syrup

Sift together all dry ingredients. Beat eggs in another bowl. Add oil, coffee, buttermilk, and pumpkin. Mix well. Add dry mixture to egg mixture and blend. Fry flapjacks in corn oil and serve piping hot with real maple syrup.

### **Creamy Pumpkin Fudge**

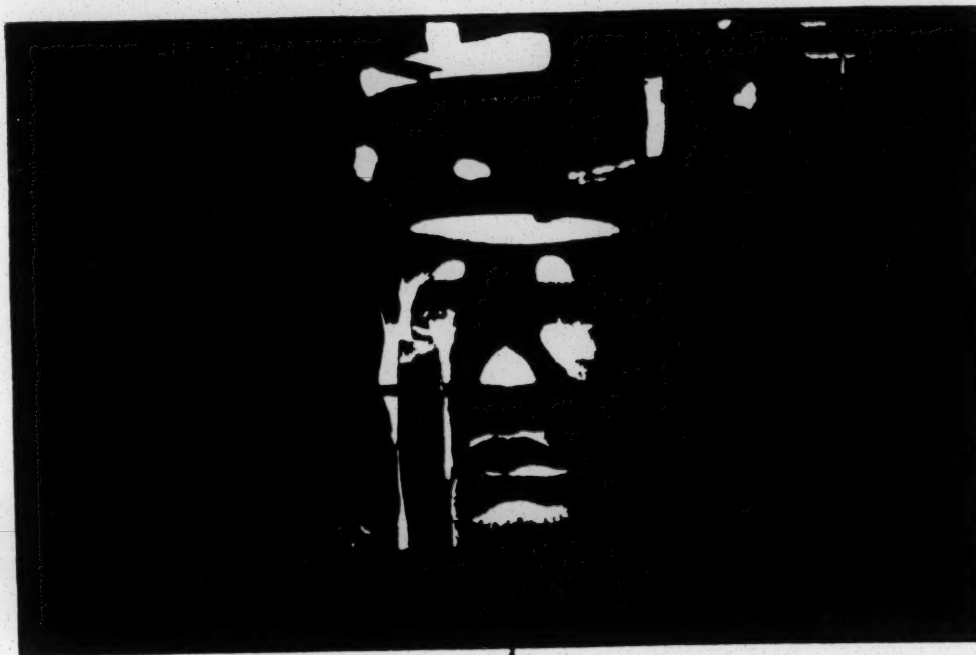
2 C. sugar  
1/3 C. cream  
1/3 C. sweetened condensed milk  
1/4 C. canned pumpkin  
2 T. light corn syrup  
1 1/2 t. pumpkin pie spice  
1/8 t. salt  
2 T. butter  
1/4 C. currants  
1/4 C. chopped pecans  
1/2 t. maple flavoring

Combine all ingredients except butter and maple flavoring in a saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil. Reduce heat; cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture reaches soft-ball stage (238 degrees). Remove from heat; add butter and maple flavoring; do not stir. Cool to 110 degrees. Beat with a spoon until mixture is very thick, creamy, and begins to hold its shape and lose its shine. Pour at once into a buttered, shallow, one-quart baking dish. Smooth top of fudge; allow to stand until cool and firm. Cut into squares.



## The Muse's Corner

### Moonstroke



#### Warrior

i run blindly  
 through the darkness  
 hounds of hell  
 snapping at my heels  
 i  
 have only  
 my instincts to trust  
 i trip  
 i fall  
 i rise again  
 my testicles hanging  
 from the coyote's  
 mouth  
 my eyes in my hands  
 i sweat  
 i scream  
 flaming snake devours my heart  
 i crash  
 i twist  
 in the treacherous  
 water  
 alligators tear me  
 limb from limb

i shoot  
 like a comet  
 illuminous body  
 feathered head dress  
 ruby teeth  
 i fear not.....

born in the desert  
 suckled by hags  
 in the valley of death  
 raised by aliens  
 schooled by cold hard experience  
 warrior  
 i  
 am  
 from the first to the last      breath

Michael Dean Pollock 1990



### He Loved Her Best When

While awaiting the hunter  
she stared down sunsets.  
Day frightened her with  
its over-exposure  
of things chromed by the sun  
until they're too polished to see.

Dusk alone soothed her  
when the dreams Dawn so easily dissipates  
release us again from the daily mould,  
as in twilight the trees' identities are shed  
and they become their shades,  
silhouettes against amethyst sky.  
Then he asks:

Why does she write only when moonlight  
whitens the page,  
creating caricatures of feelings,  
shaping her fears into fantasies,  
and making maze poems  
she is the minotaur of?

"Come find me in my poem,  
the crooked paths alone entice;  
lose yourself looking,  
that too is enticement.  
Hunt me when I'm a shadow,  
slinking between dusk and twilight  
for this is when I'm most myself.  
Do not fear to lose your way;  
losing yourself, you'll find me --  
Minotaur in an emptied maze."

As her words echo in darkness,  
the caricatures she paints rise  
from her audience  
and surround like suitors  
what they think is her;  
but they've fallen in love  
with her shadow  
just as it spreads into night.

Jesse Bryant Wilder

### Seasonal Haiku - Autumn

Burning sky candle soon to be  
Snuffed out by northern winds;  
\_\_\_Autumn sun.

Winter rattle snake noises;  
\_\_\_Last clinging leaves of Autumn.

Kathleen J. Gad

I am the Earth  
I am the gaping maw  
Come unto me, ye blessed beings

Come unto me  
lay your dead leaves down  
Let me swallow you

Enfold in me  
so that I may take you  
and bear you  
again in pain

You, who were more than  
form could hold  
must go now again

and become world....

Karin Clark



### Song of Autumn -- Rainer Maria Rilke

Lord: It is time  
The summer was very grand  
Lay down your shadow on the sundials  
and let the winds go loose upon the land.

From the fruit the final ripening pull  
Give yet two more days that are warm and full  
before you urge them to decline  
and drive the last drop of sweetness  
into the heavy wine.

He who now has no house will build him none  
Who now is alone will remain so  
will wake, read and write long letters  
will back and forth in alleyways wander  
restless, when the dead leaves blow.

Translated from the German by Karin Clark  
and dedicated to Rinsa of the Elf Lore Family



*As the Wheel Turns*  
**Astro Advice from**  
**Emery Pendragon...**



**Aries** (March 21 to April 20) ♈

*September* - Restrictions on the job will lead to confrontations with supervisors. Don't make hasty decisions. Seek the truth, and don't become disillusioned. Your friends will come through for you.

*October* - Before making decisions, let others know how you feel. Your intentions will be clearer. Energy level will subside, so make decisions then, if you do. Partnerships and spending are highlighted.

*November* - November could be your lucky month. Use it wisely. Watch investments. Don't invest large amounts after the 30th.

*December* - Communication and travel problems will be solved in the beginning of the month. Psychic energy is high. Follow intuition. Legal problems may arise, but the outcome is likely to be in your favor.

**Taurus** - (April 21 - May 20) ♉

*September* - Resources will take positive turn. Don't rush into relationships at this time. Don't take chances.

*October* - Conservative attitude should be maintained. Use imagination where career is concerned. Responsibility should be considered.

*November* - New goals will be set. Financial problems will end.

*December* - Peace and tranquility persevere. Review goals for the coming year.

**Gemini** - (May 21 - June 20) ♊

*September* - Ego trends may exhaust you. Geminis will find it harder to concentrate. Put more time into projects. Don't depend on luck.

*October* - Relationships that are not stable might end. Watch diet and be careful driving; don't speed. The new moon may bring a new relationship; this is also a good time to reinforce existing ones.

*November* - This may be a lucky time for Geminis. Watch egos. Travel plans may be delayed.

*December* - Ego problems may produce arguments. Watch spending, especially around the 14th. Legal decision may have to be made.

**Cancer** (June 21 - July 20) ♋

*September* - New relationships may form. Career produces stress. Don't let imagination get out of hand. Beware of secret enemies.

*October* - Career changes take place. Household plans take off. Increased interest in the occult at this time.

*November* - Watch for minor losses. Relationships develop. Get tax papers ready but don't despair.

*December* - December will be relatively quiet. Enjoy the Yule season.



**Leo** (July 21 - August 20) ♌

*September* - Golden opportunity presents itself. Leos looking for a mate may get their wish granted. Watch ego trends.

*October* - Conflicts in the home occur, watch resources. Avoid arguments.

*November* - Beware of schemes. Auto problems may occur. Check communication devices; replace any that need it.

*December* - Good news is received. Travel plans will be successful and investments should pay off.

**Virgo** - (August 21 - September 20) ♍

*September* - Resources will increase in early September. Watch diet to avoid health problems.

*October* - Health problems continue, nerves are affected by resource problems. Revise diet and exercise.

*November* - Financial problems come to a head. Plan and organize. A reward for a past deed could be received. Health problems subside.

*December* - Accidents and respiratory infections are prominent. Keep investments and bets to a minimum. Be sure to confirm travel connections in plenty of time.

**Libra** (September 21 - October 20) ♎

*September* - Confrontations with authorities are imminent. Choose to compromise. Use time wisely.

*October* - Employment problems end. Don't be hasty, take time to decide.

*November* - Travel opportunities present themselves. Legal problems may also pop up.

*December* - Old projects should be completed. A new path will begin.

**Scorpio** (October 21 - November 20) ♏

*September* - Scorpions will feel more comfortable in social settings. Acknowledgement is due.

*October* - A new discovery will have everlasting effect. Goals may change.

*November* - Focus on resources this month. Luck may run out; don't rely on it.

*December* - Speculations may not pay off as expected. Use good judgment when investing or gambling.

**Sagittarius** (November 21 - December 20) ♐

*September* - Family and legal problems may occur. Lack of communication could hurt you. Beware of accidents due to lack of concentration.

*October* - October could be your lucky month. Nervous energy subsides.

*November* - Interest in the arts, especially poetry, is featured. You may discover hidden fact about yourself.

*December* - Family and legal problems are resolved just in time for Yule.

**Capricorn** (December 21 - January 20) ♑

*September* - Restrictions in relationships cause conflicts. Beware of accidents on the job; don't be hasty. Chronic complaints arise.

*October* - October will be stressful. Be sure to follow instincts. Beware of schemes of any kind.



*November* - Resources will increase. Career plans are being made for you. You will know by the 18th.

*December* - Beware of scandal, it will come back to haunt you.

**Aquarius** (January 21 - February 20) *m*  
*m*

*September* - Aquarians should reflect on the past in order to plan the future. Aquarians will seek fewer restrictions concerning employment and authorities.

*October* - Focus on relationships this month; possible marriage. Responsibilities create stress; take only what you can handle.

*November* - Full moon offers solution; heed message. Energy subsides. You'll have to struggle to complete projects.

*December* - Travel plans will be postponed. New discoveries will be made.

**Pisces** (February 21 - March 20) *✕*

*September* - Pisceans need to solve their own problems. Beware of secret enemies and accidents. You'll find comfort in partnership.

*October* - Positive results from hard work. Psychic energy is very high now. Beware of schemes.

*November* - Loss of resources due to schemes possible. Feelings shouldn't interfere with good judgment. Possible inheritance. Communications are favorable.

*December* - Family problem will be resolved, but travel plans won't be. Long distance communication produces stress.



*The Moon - 15th Century Tarot Deck*



## Barter & Announcement Page

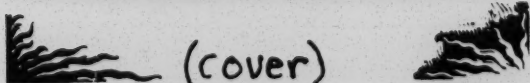
Come celebrate the Changing of the Seasons  
through Earth-Honoring Rituals held at the  
First Unitarian Church of Milwaukee  
1009 East Ogden Avenue  
(Astor at Ogden)

**Hallows** - Sunday, October 28, 4:30 p.m.  
**Winter Solstice** - Sunday, December 16, 4:30 p.m.

Order your Yule Cards now!  
These original designs sell for \$1.00  
or can be bartered for something of  
equal value. Please contact The  
Serpent's Tail and let us know how  
many you would like and terms  
of payment. Please place orders  
soon because Yule is coming  
very fast!



unto you a sun is BORN



Yule, an ancient festival celebrated on December 21st, marks  
the point at which the Sun is reborn and the days begin to grow again.  
It is celebrated by lighting Christmas fires, burning Yule logs and  
honoring Yule deities in order to return power back to the Sun.  
Solstice, the ancient Roman festival honoring the God of  
Spinning and Harvest was celebrated at this time of year with much  
feasting and merrymaking. Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ.  
Yule songs are now being heard across the country in Scandinavia and  
Scandinavian traditions involving Yule or Yule songs about the winter dark  
ness at this turning point in the Solar Year.

Cover picture "The Ancestors of  
Days" by William Blake  
Ahead of the Year Greeting Cards

(back cover)

(cover)

## Announcing a New Barter Exchange Network

The Serpent's Tail would like to announce a new Barter Exchange Network section. It is an alternative to an "advertising" page in that we would like to receive announcements from members of the community offering goods and services that they would like to trade or barter with other network members. The trade or barter agreement would be left to the discretion of the parties involved as to whether they would want to exchange money or goods and services.

We prefer hand-crafted or home business items and products that are ecologically safe and conscious. Our attempt here is to be a proponent of alternatives to the mainstream and to enable more dependence on each other rather than on the dictates of an enormous corporate monoeconoculture. We reserve our right as the editorial board to accept or reject material within this broad framework. If you feel that you have goods & services that you can offer to the exchange network, please contact us.

Announcements are free in exchange for a membership (\$10) which also entitles you to four seasonal issues. We prefer announcements that are copy-ready and written in standard business-card size. It is also possible for us to do the typesetting for you.

Power to the People!



Entering into



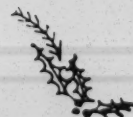
the longest night



Entering into



the Birth of Light



(inside)

### Editorial Policy

We encourage our readers to make any contributions to the Journal such as letters or articles if you wish to do so. Please see our more detailed call for contributors on the inside back cover. Our next issue will be out on the Winter Solstice, December 21, 1990. The deadline for submissions is December 1, 1990. Please send any copies of articles, poems, etc. along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. We will send you a release form allowing us to print your article and make any grammatical corrections. Please send your materials to:

The Serpent's Tail, P.O. Box 07437, Milwaukee, WI 53207





THE SERPENT'S TAIL



## A CALL TO ALL

*Shamans, Magicians, Amazons, Networkers, Rainbow Warriors, Fairies, Cooperators, Satyrs, Nymphs, Tribespeople, Forestfolk, Wizards, Elves, Witches, Gypsies, Ecnauts, Pythonesses, Recyclers, Grokers, Consciousness Explorers and Treehuggers..*

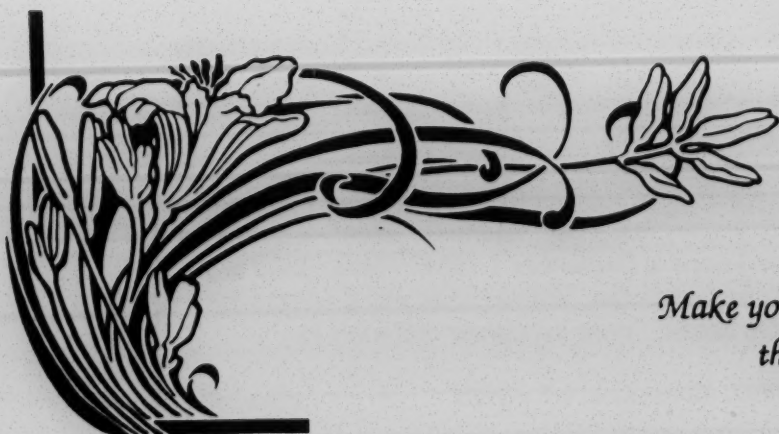
## PLEASE SUBMIT

*articles, poems, essays, invocations, rituals, recipes,  
chants, songs, artwork, letters to the editor, announcements, etc.*

## ON THESE TOPICS

*Astrology, Herbalism, Magick, Wicca, Shamanism, Comparative Mythologies, Buddhism, Goddess Worship, Native American, Egyptian Mysteries, Environmental Issues, Tarot, I Ching, Runes, Seasonal Subjects and other New Aeon-Related topics to:*

*The Serpent's Tail, P.O. Box 07437, Milwaukee, WI 53207*



*Make your Contributions in Creating  
the New Myths for the  
New Aeon!*





# A CALL TO ALL

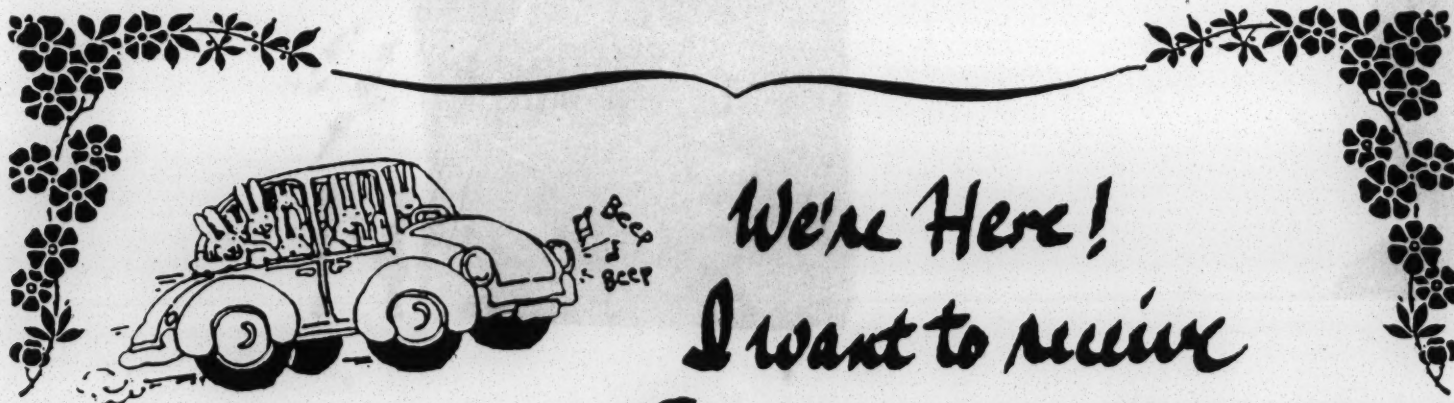


Would you like us to keep (re)creating The Serpent's Tail for the seasonal transitions? Here at the core (editorial board) we are finding the \$\$ side becoming too much for just us to bear. We are weaving a sustaining web. We ask your support in strengthening the connections...

Receive 4 seasonal journals for a minimum donation of \$10.00. Back issues are still available! (Samhain, 1989, Yule 1989, Spring Equinox 1990 and Summer, 1990) \$2.00 each.

We especially need access to any kind of printing or photocopying equipment. Any other donations you're moved to send will be appreciated and acknowledged.

We live in Milwaukee and our reach is universal.



We're Here!  
I want to receive  
The Serpent's Tail

Link me on with the \_\_\_\_\_ season!

Send to: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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